



File Code: 3420

Date: June 27, 2006

Lawrence Morrin
Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Southwest Regional Office
P.O. Box 26567
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Dear Mr. Morrin:

On June 19 & 20, Steve Thomas (Jicarilla Agency) and Dave Conklin of our staff met to evaluate a proposed FY 2007 dwarf mistletoe suppression project on the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. They also examined recently completed portions of a FY 2006 project area, as well as a potential area for a FY 2008 project.

The FY 2007 proposal included treatment of several cutting units on Pounds Mesa and in the Stock Driveway area totaling 268 acres. During this two-day field evaluation, which included walk-through and/or drive-through examinations of each unit, they agreed on some significant modifications to the original proposal (explained below). Steve has since amended the proposal to include a total of 257 acres in these two areas.

Pounds Mesa. The extensive ponderosa pine forest on Pounds Mesa was the site of a large timber sale in 1997 and 1998. Many of the cutting units were infested with dwarf mistletoe; the sale removed most infected trees of commercial size. Since 2002, Forest Health Protection funds (cost-shared with Jicarilla Apache Nation) have been used to remove diseased and excess trees in the smaller size-classes on more than 800 acres. The FY 2007 project represents the final phase of this effort on Pounds Mesa. The original proposal included Units 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13B, totaling 162 acres.

Unit 9 (29 acres) is on a gently sloping bench and is characterized by small, dense groups of pole and small sawtimber-size trees interspersed among small openings. Unit 10 (79 acres) includes some steeper slopes and has a more uneven-aged structure, including a larger component of older trees. Both these units have light to moderate mistletoe infection, and should benefit from the proposed sanitation thinning.

Unit 11 (24 acres), a relatively open, multistoried stand, has moderate to severe infection throughout. Following our examination, we agreed to defer treatment here, since many portions are deficient in suitable crop trees. Nearby Unit 12 (5 acres) has much lighter infection, however, and should benefit from sanitation thinning.



Unit 13 B (25 acres) is predominantly pole-size and has light infection, with most of the infected trees along the west side of the unit. This stand is more uniformly dense than the other proposed units (easily exceeding 500 trees/acre in many portions), and should benefit greatly from the proposed treatment.

Following an examination of Unit 3 (not in the original proposal), we agreed to add a 40 acre portion to the FY 2007 proposal. This is an overstocked pole and small sawtimber-size stand with light, scattered infection. A 10 acre portion along the south side of this unit with very shallow soils and heavy mistletoe infection would be excluded.

The thinning prescription for each of the selected units would retain 80 to 100 crop trees/acre, favoring the best available dominant and codominants. Lightly infected trees over 5" dbh would be retained where needed for stocking, but all infected trees less than 5" dbh would be cut. In general, we recommend removing as much mistletoe as possible without sacrificing the best trees.

Our examination of recently completed Pounds Mesa Units 29 and 15 (see our 3420 letter of July 8, 2005) indicated that the Tribal crew has continued to do a good job selecting quality leave trees. Despite the spring thinning, the slash had very little colonization of *Ips* engraver beetles, similar to what we have observed in previous years at Jicarilla. At the time of this visit, the thinning crew had just started treatment of Unit 17, the remaining portion of the FY 2006 project.

Stock Driveway. This area was commercially harvested in 2000 and 2001 under a single-tree selection prescription, similar to the previous sale on Pounds Mesa. Most of the larger dwarf mistletoe-infected trees were removed from infested cutting units at that time. The proposed FY 2007 follow-up treatment would fell infected and excess trees in the smaller size classes. Six small units (Units 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, & 9) totaling 106 acres were included in the original proposal.

Each of these units is predominantly ponderosa pine, with minor amounts of Douglas-fir. Most trees are pole and small-sawtimber size; several of these units have a significant component of larger trees and some have occasional groups of younger regeneration. Units 1, 2, 4, and 5 have relatively light (less than 30% of stems infected) dwarf mistletoe, while Units 8 and 9 have more severe infection. Current stocking is highly variable within each unit, but averages from about 200 to over 300 trees per acre.

Following our examination, we agreed to defer treatment of Unit 9 (27 acres). It appears likely that thinning this stand would exacerbate the mistletoe, and that long-term benefits would not exceed the cost of treatment. The remaining units should all respond favorably to the proposed treatment, which would retain 80 to 100 of the best dominant and codominant trees per acre. Mistletoe would be addressed as indicated above for Pounds Mesa.

Continental Divide area. The ponderosa pine forest here has experienced considerable mortality over the past several years, a result of severe mistletoe infection, bark beetles, and drought. A small viga sale was conducted in this area (south of Tribal Road J-16) last winter. Following this recent entry and the preceeding mortality events, three units with extensive mistletoe infection are understocked, somewhat resembling seed-tree cuts (photo).



Continental Divide area following viga sale

The Agency may replant these sites or alternatively, monitor for natural regeneration over the next few years. Presently, however, there remains a scattering of smaller infected trees and “whips” that threaten long-term regeneration success. Steve may request Forest Health Protection funding in FY 2008 to “clean-up” these units, which could be accomplished at a relatively low cost per acre. The remaining large trees, many of which are infected, would remain on these sites as a seed source and to address visual concerns. If these units are eventually replanted, it will be prudent to avoid planting within one chain of these remaining infection sources.

Summary and Conclusion. Modification of the Agency’s original FY 2007 proposal includes deferral of Pounds Mesa Unit 11 and Stock Driveway Unit 9, and addition of Pounds Mesa Unit 3. This project should reduce long-term damage from dwarf mistletoe, increase growth on selected crop trees, and improve overall forest conditions. We commend the Jicarilla Agency and Tribe for their commitment to forest health, and we look forward to assisting with these efforts in the future. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Dave Conklin at (505) 842-3288 or via e-mail at daconklin@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc: Marlin A Johnson
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Roger Jenson (Jicarilla Agency), Steve Thomas (Jicarilla Agency), John Waconda (Southwest Regional Office, BIA)